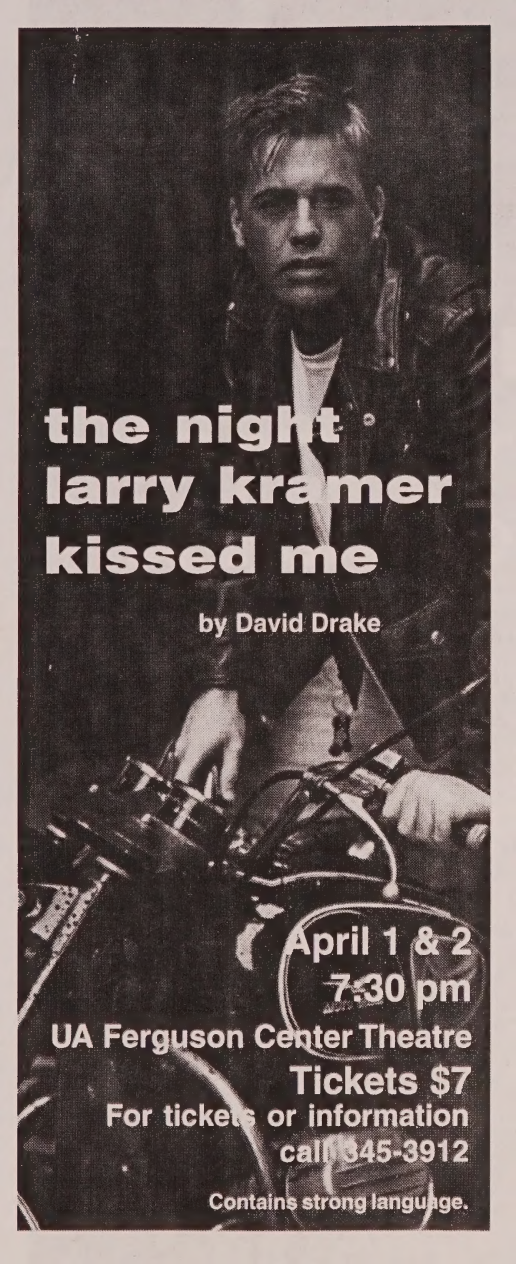




the night larry kramer kissed me

by David Drake

**April 1 & 2
7:30 pm**

UA Ferguson Center Theatre

Tickets \$7

For tickets or information

call 345-3912

Contains strong language.

In *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, Obie-winning playwright David Drake documents a gay man's journey of self-discovery in a series of meticulously crafted scenes that are alternately lyrical, brutal and hilarious. The title refers not to an actual caress, but to the night the author received the "kiss" of pride and self-awareness from seeing Kramer's play *The Normal Heart*. *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is not only a valuable record of a landmark theatrical event, but also an important contribution to the literature of gay pride, enlightenment, and activism.

"...*The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is an event worth celebrating. In an important way, it is not just a play, but also a tribute to a world that, despite Herculean contributions to the advance of civilization, has endured discrimination and deprecation.

At one point the play's narrator complains, "It's so hard to see in the dark."

Yes, but a play like this - like all works of art - is a point of light shining against that darkness, driving out those night terrors, and helping to reveal and illuminate the human condition - beyond gay, beyond straight - the HUMAN condition."

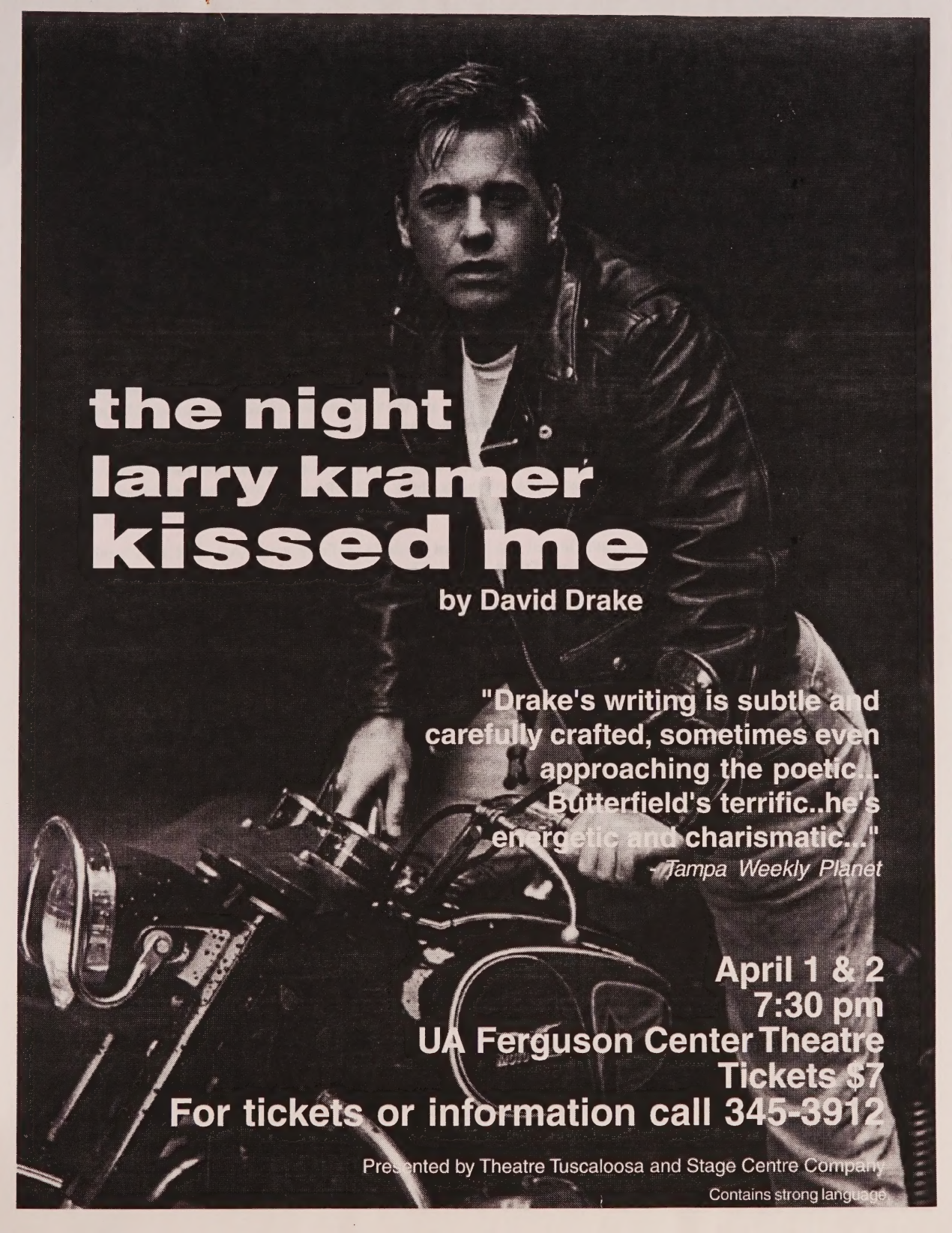
-Tampa Tribune

"A clamorous, unboring, diversionary drive toward consciousness-raising and self-affirmation from childhood to maturity that leaves no byway unexplored. His is a poet's mind with a mastery of language."

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To experience David Drake's *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is to bear witness to an explosion that has occurred in the gay and lesbian community in America.

Author and playwright Larry Kramer was among those who lit the fuse. In 1987, Kramer gave an impassioned speech to an audience at the Lesbian And Gay Community Services Center in New York City. He attacked the government for its negligent response to the AIDS plague, chided his audience of gay men and lesbians for not venting their rage, and made an urgent call to action.

The small group of individuals who took up Kramer's call formed a group committed to direct action and civil disobedience to end the AIDS crisis: ACT UP- the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. The group's brash public demonstrations were immediately controversial but immensely effective at drawing attention to the epidemic. Its membership soon mushroomed, and chapters rose up in cities and towns around the country.

Those who worked within ACT-UP in New York at the time could not have imagined the far-reaching effect their political organizing would have. They did not end the AIDS crisis, as many of them believed they would; the ravages of AIDS are in fact worse now than ever before, and government inaction is still mainly to blame.

But ACT-UP did send a jolt through all of American society, a message that something was dreadfully wrong. The mainstream media were pushed to look at the epidemic more often and with a bit more insight. The Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health reexamined their glacial bureaucracies and began to streamline some policies. Political candidates were put on the spot about AIDS and felt hard pressed to make promises to AIDS activists.

Most significantly, ACT-UP moved hundreds of thousands of complacent gay men and lesbians around the country to action. It gave courage to those who were frightened, invigorated those who were morally and spiritually drained, and brought scores of men and women out of the closet, convincing them that the most forceful way to fight AIDS was to put a face on a community that had been decimated by it. ACT-UP brought to the queer individual, perhaps for the first time, to his or her community. After two years, ACT-UP spawned the equally brazen Queer Nation, a group determined to rout the closet of American culture.

But perhaps ACT-UP's greatest impact was its most subtle. In the first pivotal years of ACT-UP's existence, from 1987 through 1991, the group was a sort of finishing school for many who, through magazines, books, film, art and theatre, would take its powerful message far and wide in the years to come.

Like Tony Kushner with his Broadway hit *Angels in America*, and like Kramer himself with his 1992 critically acclaimed Off-Broadway play *The Destiny of Me*, David Drake is one of those who took that message to the stage. In *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* Drake masterfully articulates ACT-UP's most provocative mantra: Turn anger into action. The play is infused with fury over the AIDS crisis, over gay-bashing and over homophobia, and it challenges the audience to take that passion and do something constructive with it.

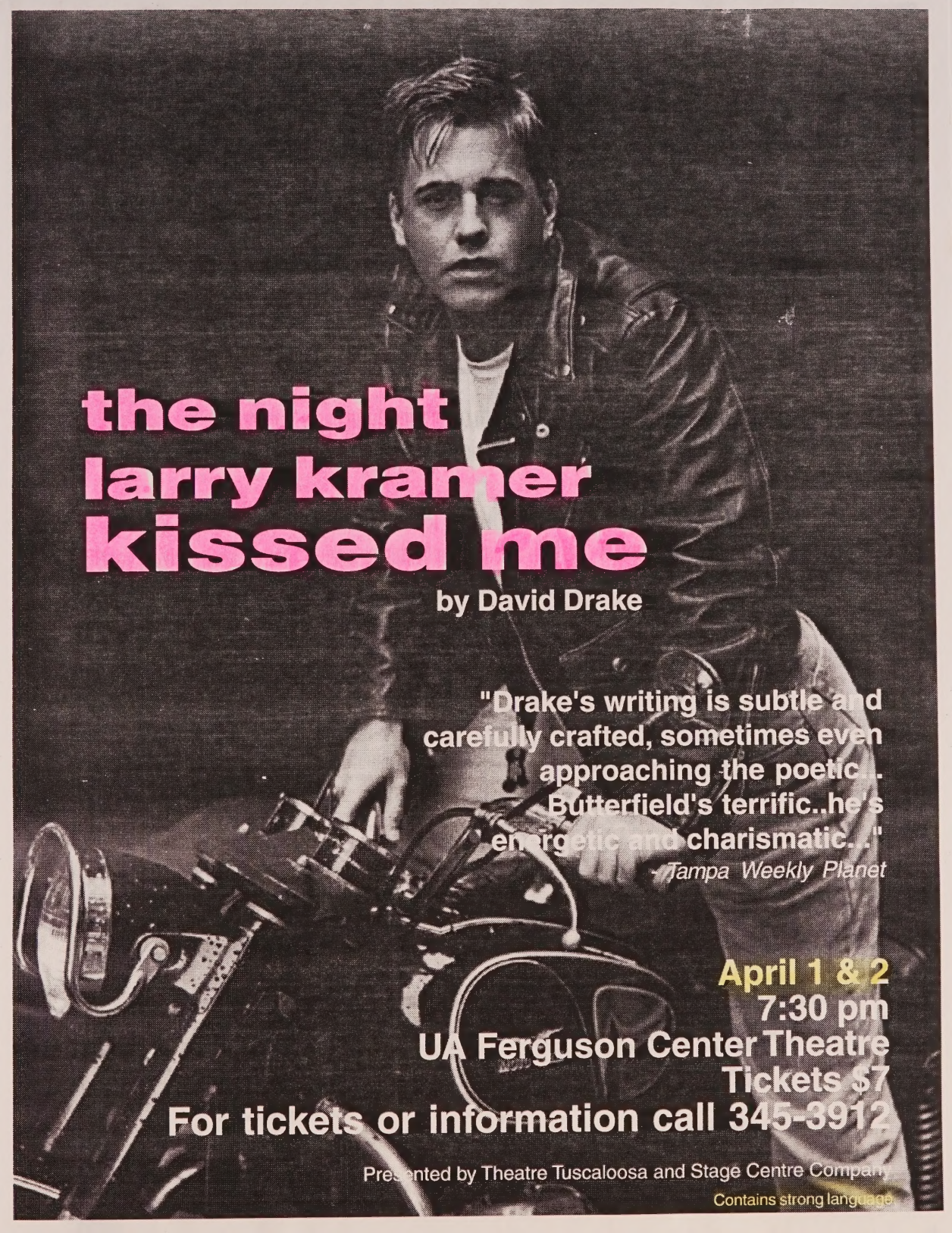
But, also like ACT-UP, rather than continually foisting gloom on his audience or, worse yet, lecturing them into oblivion, Drake utilizes brilliant wit and boyish style to fire his compelling misse. It makes for a commanding and demanding yet highly entertaining look at contemporary gay life.

It is in fact with his sense of humor that this talented man coaxes us to take a serious look at ourselves. Drake prods gay men to examine their true motivations in pieces like "Why I Go to the Gym" and "12' single", while at the same time allowing us to laugh at our often ridiculous behavior. In the "The Birthday Triptych: The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me" we learn of Drake's first actions after seeing Larry Kramer's landmark play *The Normal Heart* in 1985 and after being filled with fear and rage over the New York Times' scant coverage of AIDS- before he finally joined ACT-UP: "I ran for days to escape the invisible, unprintable killer," he tells us "I ran for a fantasy. I ran for a fix. I ran for 42nd Street: The Musical." And, while *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is imbued with a sense of gay history, Drake takes us on a romp into the future that surely feeds some of our darker fantasies, complete with the assassination of Rush Limbaugh, the imprisonment of Phyllis Schlafly, and the outing of Siskel and Ebert.

Perhaps most importantly, David Drake is fiercely out of the closet and unapologetic. Those who see or read *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* witness the writing of a proud, young, gay man who is fighting back. And millions of people - including gay teens in search of validation - who have read Drake's reviews, seen him on television talk shows or perused through the countless newspapers and magazines that have featured him, have seen a queer role model for our times. In that way, *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is a coming of age story for a new queer generation, and Drake, with clarity and humor, makes this generation's central point: Coming out of the closet is a necessity for everyone. Not only is it the most important action a person can take for his or her community at this crucial period in time, but it is the most powerful thing a person can do for his or her own, personal well-being.

That is the message - the message of ACT-UP, the message of Larry Kramer - with which David Drake himself now "kisses" thousands of people across America.

-Michelangelo Signorile



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-New York Observer

"*The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* will become to Gay Pride Day what *Miracle on 34th Street* is to Christmas! Brash, naked, eloquent. Shamelessly in your face!

- New York Newsday



to — JOANNA B. PINNEO
on, Peter Esfahs

American Stage
to kick off its main-
Ganesh by Terrence

the play is about find-
on a spiritual quest,
appeals to the core the-
ence. For another, Mo-
lar playwright with a
at includes his play in-
a diva Maria Callas,
which just opened on

important, timely is-
that really connects
ice," says Lisa Powers,
of American Stage.
ed *A Perfect Ganesh*,
tonight.
in a hot streak. He
y Award-winning book
a *Kiss Of The Spider*
spring, he won the
play for *Love! Valour!*
A Perfect Ganesh was a
Pulitzer Prize in drama
ers to the Hindu god of
a character in the
has said he was im-
es he met briefly on a

inter executive director
A *Perfect Ganesh*, but

at Ruth Eckerd Hall
400.
rts Center. Tickets:

at 8 p.m. Dec. 8 at
\$9303.

Orchestra and audi-
Sacred Heart Church
Petersburg. Tickets:
at \$7. 286-2403 in

music by Duke
Company at Mahaf-
98-2100.

he dropped out in August. Powers felt comfortable step-
ing in to direct on short notice.

"The first time I read the play, I felt I had a real under-
standing of it," she says. "I didn't feel as if it was going to
be a stretch. I never felt I didn't understand what the play
is about."

And what is it about? "I think it's about how fragile we
are as individuals, how much pain we carry around and
the difficulty we have in getting past that," Powers says.
"It's about the importance of connecting with other hu-
man beings. The spiritual journey is a long one."

The cast — Jeff Norton, Both Dlimon, Julia Flood and
Peter Esfahs — spent an unusually long time reading
and discussing McNally's play at the beginning of re-
hearsal. "We were at the table for four days," Powers
says.

A challenge in staging the play was that the scenic de-
sign must communicate a range of settings, from hotel
room to boat. Uno Toyos was the designer.

"It's a non-realistic set," Powers says. "We're not trying
to do a real airplane, a real train, a real hotel room. If you
try to create too much realism, you might as well make a
movie."

A *Perfect Ganesh* runs through Dec. 3, with no perfor-
mance Thanksgiving Day. Tickets are \$18-\$24. Call 822-
8814.

SARASOTA THEATER — It seems that Howard Mill-
man, in his first season as producing artistic director of
the Asolo Theater, is out to show you can go home again.
Millman is bringing back a number of actors from the
theater's bygone glory days to be part of its rotating
repertory company. They include Isa Thomas, Brad Wal-
lace, Doug Jones, Sheridan Crist, David S. Howard and
Robert Murch. The Asolo's rep season opens Dec. 9 with
The *Three Musketeers* by Eberle Thomas.

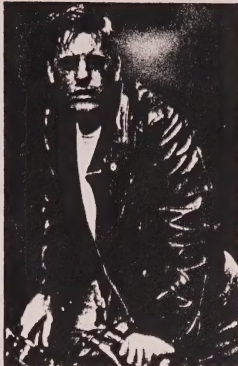
Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*, which won the
1994 Pulitzer Prize for drama, will be staged in January at
Florida Studio Theater.

ORCHESTRA — An odd episode marked last Friday's
concert by the Florida Orchestra and Master Choral at
Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. With music director
Jehia Ling standing helplessly on the podium, the start of
the concert was delayed for 15 minutes as TBPAC and or-
chestra officials searched for the source of a high-pitched
whine in the hall. It was somebody's hearing aid device
turned up too loud, an all-too-common occurrence at con-
certs nowadays. Finally, after several appeals to the audi-
ence, the noise vanished and the concert got under way.
Ah, the marvels of modern technology.

American Stage artistic director Lisa Powers is the
narrator of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* in the orches-
tra's family concert at 2 p.m. Sunday at Ruth Eckerd Hall.
Also on the program: *Buckaroo Holiday* from Copland's
Rodeo. Tickets are \$2 for adults and \$5 for children. Call
the box office at 791-7400.

MUSIC — The St. Petersburg Symphony debuts with
concerts at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Octagon Arts Center
in Clearwater and at 3 p.m. Sunday at Pasadena Commu-
nity Church. Franz Mantini is the soloist in Beethoven's
Piano Concerto No. 4, and Cameron Home conducts. Al-
so to be played are Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and
Sibelius' *Finlandia*. The new orchestra is described as a
mix of professional and amateur players by manager
Steven Price. Tickets are \$4 and \$8. Call 230-3184.

MORE MUSIC — Irish pianist Barry Douglas is the
soloist in Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto* as part of a con-
cert by the Moscow Philharmonic, Vassily Sinalsky con-
ducting, at 8 tonight at Van Wezel Hall. Tickets are \$29-
\$47, with \$10 student rush tickets sold a half hour before
the start. Call (800) 826-9303. ... USF cello professor
Scott Kluksdahl takes on Bach's six *Suites for Solo Cello*
in a two-concert marathon Saturday at the Music Recital
Hall on the school's Tampa campus. Kluksdahl will play
Nos. 1, 4 and 5 at 5 p.m. and Nos. 2, 3 and 6 at 8 p.m.
Tickets are \$2 and \$3, with one ticket good for both con-
certs. Call 974-2323. ... Finnish cellist Jan-Erik Gustaf-
son and pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera play works of
Martini, Brahms, Schumann and Shostakovich at 2 p.m.
Sunday at the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.
Tickets are \$5-\$8. Call 896-2667.



BOY TO MAN:
John
Butterfield
takes the
lead in
The Night
Larry
Kramer
Kissed
Me.

Boy to man, fireflies to candles

AT A GLANCE

The *Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, directed by Kelly
Smith, through Nov. 26 at the Off Center Theater of
Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. Tickets are \$1 and
\$12. Call 229-7827 or (800) 955-1045.

By SUSAN EASTMAN
Times Correspondent

In the dark of a girlfriend's basement, a boy lights
Barbie's Dream House with a jar of fireflies. As a
man, he lights a candle for each friend lost to
AIDS.

The *Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* is a coming-of-
age story that stitches the private life of one gay man
into the larger social and political fabric.

The play begins on June 27, 1969, at a Baltimore
community theater production of *West Side Story* on
the evening of the boy's sixth birthday. He sits cap-
tivated by the fantasy of New York City presented in
the musical. "The dancing, the dancing, the dancing,"
he says. On the same night, in the real New
York City, the violence of the Stonewall Riots marks
the beginning of the gay rights movement in the
United States.

Undoubtedly, David Drake, who wrote and origi-
nally performed this autobiographical play, brought a
poignancy and honesty to the telling of his story that
another actor cannot match.

Good acting keeps the Loft Theater production en-
gaging. Boston actor John Butterfield gives a nicely
textured performance that moves his character be-
tween boyish and sincere political activist, nursemaid
to death and cynical seducer without becoming
preachy and pedantic or trite.

Butterfield was awkward playing his character as a
child. Those early years — he owns his own Barbie
and has memorized the entire soundtrack of *A Cho-
rus Line* — seem generic and formulaic at times.

After waiting at times for it to come alive again,
and getting a reward here and there, both the play
and Butterfield suddenly ignite on the night that the
character, as a young man living in New York City,
sees Larry Kramer's landmark AIDS play *The Nor-
mal Heart*. On *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*,
which he henceforth calls that night, the character
understands the horror of the AIDS epidemic and
leaves the theater stunned that the world hasn't
changed, stunned at the straight world's denial and
blame.

The sections that follow — like "Why I Go to the
Gym," "12 Single," and "A Thousand Points of Light"
— are almost self-enclosed performance pieces in
themselves, sharply drawn and poignant comments
on gay bashing, AIDS and sex as pornography. But-
terfield tears into them.

scene, about all the subtle choices Powers made, and about the unusual and magnetic performance by Norton. But by now you've gotten the idea. *A Perfect Ganesh* is sad, powerful and absolutely fascinating.

A Perfect Ganesh runs through Dec. 3 at American Stage. Call 823-1600.

A 'Night' to Remember?

The Loft Theatre's season has also just opened, with a production of *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, a one-man show written by David Drake and performed by a Boston actor named John Butterfield.

Drake's play is impressive in the way it uses a hodgepodge of styles and a disjointed, episodic structure and still ends up being a cohesive portrait of a young gay man.

It's also impressive in the way it avoids the clichés rampant in so many recent plays with a gay theme: the puerile sexual celebrations of plays like *Jeffrey*, the campy cross-dressing of plays by people like Charles Busch, and the self-pity of so many second-rate AIDS plays.

Drake's writing is subtle and carefully crafted, sometimes even approaching the poetic. It works best when it's personal, as in the story referenced in the title, when Drake was moved by a performance of Kramer's play *The Normal Heart*.

But there isn't enough of the uniquely personal in Drake's script. The character is a sort of gay Everyman whose persona consists of little more than his sexuality.

Butterfield's performance, directed by Kelly Smith, the Loft's artistic director, is terrific. He's energetic and charismatic and makes even the worst segment of the script -- a long and stupid disco rap piece delivered over obnoxious and painfully loud music -- marginally worthwhile.

The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me is intended mostly for gay audiences, who will no doubt connect more with Drake's look at life. Others are apt to find it well-written and very well-performed but still distant.

The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me runs through Nov. 26 at the Off Center Theater. call 229-STAR. ●

C U R T A I N C A L L

All in the Timing: The second local production in recent weeks of David Ives' popular collection of one-acts. This one's from TheatreUSF, and it's directed by Nancy Cole. The six pieces are all witty, amusing and original. There's one about Leon Trotsky dying over and over, one about Philip Glass buying bread, and one about existential chimpanzees. Through Nov. 18 in the University of South Florida's Theatre 2. Tickets are \$8 general admission, \$4 for students and seniors. Call 974-2323.

Cat's Paw: An outfit called Performers' Studio Workshop is staging this drama by William Mastrosimone (*Extremities*) week nights at the Off Center Theater. The company, I'm told, comprises mostly television actors. The script is pretty strong, though its central premise -- the media encouraging criminals -- has become a cliché in the years since Mastrosimone wrote it. Nov. 21-22. Call 229-STAR.

Children of a Lesser God: You probably know the movie, which is fairly compelling. The play has more of an edge, though at its core it's still a poignant love story about a teacher at a school for deaf students and a withdrawn young woman who works there. The Fairmont Theatre for the Deaf brings its production -- which is spoken and signed -- to Ruth Eckerd Hall as part of the Adults+Leisure Series at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 22. Tickets are \$10.50. Call 791-7400.

The Florida Orchestra: Pianist Jeffrey Kahane is featured on Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G* in this week's Masterworks Series concert. Also on the program are Schumann's *Symphony No. 1* ("Spring") and Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Weber*. Jahja Ling, one of Tampa's treasures, conducts. 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 17 at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center; 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 18 at Bayfront Center; and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 19 at Ruth Eckerd Hall. Tickets prices are \$19, \$23, \$29 and \$32. Call 286-2403.

A Grand Night for Singing: The Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center's latest long-running show is a revue of Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. There are dozens of great songs -- "I Have Dreamed," "If I Loved You," "This Nearly Was Mine" -- plus a good band and some fine voices. But there's also some idiotic dialogue and lots of wilted choreography. Through Feb. 25 at the Jaeb Theatre. Call 229-STAR.

Jane Eyre: A musical adaptation [by Ted Davis and David Clark] of Charlotte Brontë's haunting Victorian romance. Through Nov. 26 at the Merit Theatre at Asolo Center in Sarasota. Call 941-351-8000.

Miss Margarida's Way: Rosemary Orlando plays a monstrous eighth grade teacher in this one-woman show by Brazilian playwright Roberto Athayde. The script doesn't have a lot to say, but when Orlando is "on," it can be pretty funny; when she's not, it's awfully uncomfortable. Jeff Norton directs. Through Nov. 19 at the Warehouse Theatre. Tickets are \$11 for students, \$13 for everyone else. Call 223-3076.

Ruff Stuff: The latest batch of works-in-progress from the Off Center Artists Collective. In this edition, you'll see snippets of new pieces by Wednesday Lampinen, Joan Strauman, Dawn Clark and Janet Stanley; then you'll be asked for your reactions and suggestions. It's fun, it's cheap, and it's something to do on a Monday night. 8 p.m. Nov. 20 at the Off Center Theater. Tickets are \$3, available only at the door.

Tribe: Randy James Johnson's latest opus concerns a group of runaways who take refuge in Errol Flynn's swimming pool (drained, I presume). They fall under the spell of a Koresian leader (played by Gregg Freeman) and then have to deal with an attack by the LAPD. The opening was delayed a couple of times, and the ticket sales have been good, so the run has been extended through Nov. 18. At Pig's Eye Studio, 2213 E. Sixth Avenue. Ticket prices range from \$6.50 to \$11. Call 247-6653.

Theatre



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A cooperative effort with Shelton State Community College

Paul K. Looney
Artistic Director

3/14/96

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